POP 88041 MSc Research Design A

Michaelmas Term 2025-26
Wednesdays 11am-1pm, PX 201

Instructor: Dr. Gizem Arikan
Email: arikang@tcd.ie
Office: College Green, 4.02
Office hours: Fridays 11.00 am -1.00 pm or by appointment

Description and Learning Objectives

This graduate seminar introduces students to the scientific inquiry of the political world. Students will learn how to identify compelling research questions and how to structure a study that contributes to an existing body of research. Moreover, we will discuss the problems of causal inference and multiple methodological approaches (statistical analysis, process tracing, case studies) to the empirical study of politics. The emphasis of the module will be on the development of novel, falsifiable, and empirically testable explanations of political phenomena.

At the end of the course, students are expected to gain a greater understanding of the research process, problems associated with conducting social research, become familiar with different research methods, learn how to formulate research questions, hypotheses, and selecting appropriate research design and data sources to test their hypotheses. Students will gain first-hand experience by writing article reviews and putting together a full research proposal, thus helping them to build the skills essential to conduct high quality research in the field of international relations and comparative politics.

Office Hours and Contact with Students

Office hours for this term are Fridays 11.00 am – 1.00 pm.

In case the office hours clash with your other modules or responsibilities, please let me know and we can try to make an appointment for a different day and time.

I will respond to your e-mails within 48 hours on weekdays during the teaching weeks. If you send an email during the weekend, do not expect to receive an immediate reply.

Please note that I will not be able to answer substantive questions concerning course content via e-mail. In case you have such questions, please set up an appointment for office hours or raise them during class meetings. Please bear in mind that I will not cover the lecture material for you during office hours, as office hours are not intended to replace lectures.

Module Requirements and Grading

Participation 10%

Research Question 5%

Literature review 10%

Empirical strategy 15%

Final proposal 60%

Participation. Student's active participation in class discussions and learning activities is a central element of the seminar. Students are expected to have done <u>all</u> required readings, to have acquired knowledge, and developed informed questions or critiques based the readings *prior to the class meeting*.

Some weeks, there will be in-class activities that students will complete and submit. Students are also expected to demonstrate active and informed engagement in class discussions. This ranges from answering questions, asking informed questions to constructively engaging with your peers' views or questions. Students will be evaluated on the <u>quality</u> of their input in class discussions and debate. Merely attending class or making uninformed comments are not sufficient for achieving a passing participation mark.

Seminar attendance is mandatory, and absence may result in a lowered overall module grade ***except for the week/s in which the student cannot attend because of sickness or an emergency.*** In such circumstances, **the students should inform me (if possible) before the seminar.**

The best learning environment is the one in which all members feel respected while being productively challenged. The course is dedicated to fostering an inclusive atmosphere, in which all participants can contribute, explore, and challenge their own ideas as well as those of others. All interactions in class will be civil, respectful, and supportive of an inclusive learning environment for all students. These rules are reciprocal, i.e, students are also expected to interact with instructors in a civil and respectful manner. Students are encouraged to speak to the instructor about any concerns they may have about classroom participation and classroom dynamics. Every participant has an active responsibility to foster a climate of intellectual stimulation, openness, and respect for diverse perspectives, questions, personal backgrounds, abilities, and experiences.

Research question (due on 10 October, 5pm). Students will submit a short assignment outlining a clear, explanatory research question. The assignment should identify the dependent and independent variables and justify the relevance and importance of the question with reference to relevant studies.

The aim of this exercise is to help you begin preparing early for the final research proposal. Ideally, the question you develop here will form the basis of your final design, although you may revise or change it later as your project evolves.

(Word limit: 250-300 words, excluding title page + references)

Literature review (due on 3 November, 5pm). Students will prepare a short literature review situating their research question within the existing body of scholarship and highlighting the gap in the literature their project addresses. It is expected that you engage with at least 8–10 academic publications although more is allowed (as long as they remain relevant). The review should focus on 1) how existing research has approached similar questions, 2) summarize the main findings, and 3) identify areas of consensus and divergence. You may also point out limitations in prior studies (e.g. data, scope, applicability) and address what remains unanswered.

The goal is to provide a clear justification for your research question by identifying the gap in knowledge your project will address. The review should be concise, up to date, and include the most influential works in the field.

Word limit: 1200-1800 words, excluding title page + references

Empirical strategy (due on 21 November, 5pm). In this assignment, students must propose a suitable methodological approach for their project. This discussion should include a clear outline

of the method to be used, a justification for its appropriateness and utility for the research question, and consideration of feasibility and ethical issues in data collection or analysis. All claims should be properly referenced. Students should also identify **at least one** alternative (and appropriate) methodological approach and explain why they prefer their chosen method over this alternative, with reference to the strengths and limitations of both. The assignment should also discuss potential data sources, their availability, and the practicality of accessing/collecting them.

Word limit: 800-1200 words, excluding title page + references

Final research proposal (due on 15 December, 5pm). The final submission brings together the key elements of your project into a full research proposal with the following components: a clear research question, a concise review of the relevant literature that justifies the relevance and need for this project, a theoretical framework (mechanisms) and hypothesis, a detailed research design and empirical strategy, discussion of data sources, and a conclusion that outlines the potential contributions and limitations of the study.

Ideally, most sections of the proposal will already have been developed in earlier assignments (Research Question, Literature Review, Empirical Strategy) and you are expected to revise these based on the feedback you received. While the project may evolve or change over the weeks, the final proposal should present a coherent, feasible, and well-justified plan for a piece of research in political science or international relations. Detailed guidelines on structure and formatting will be provided separately.

Although you may use this paper as a first attempt for your MSc dissertation project, there is no need to do so, and you are not at all required to write your MSc dissertation on the topic you choose to pursue for this module. However, you ***should not*** submit a proposal that overlaps with material submitted to another M.Sc. module.

Word limit: 2500 – 4000 words, excluding title page + references

More detailed information about assignments will be provided on Blackboard and discussed in class.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity free from fraud and deception. Academic dishonesty, including, but not limited to, cheating on an exam or assignment, plagiarizing, representing someone else's work as your own, submitting work previously used without the informing and taking the consent of the instructor, fabricating of information or citations, etc. will not be tolerated.

It is a student's responsibility to ensure that research sources are properly acknowledged. Plagiarism comes in many forms but it is mainly seen as stealing someone else's words or ideas and passing them off as your own. The key point is to be aware that all work that is submitted by students must be work that they have completed themselves, with any material that has not been produced by the student (e.g. ideas, quotations etc.) being clearly indicated through proper referencing.

Plagiarism is often not intentional –it happens because students are not fully aware of what counts as academic dishonesty. I strongly recommend that you familiarize yourselves with academic integrity and good research and writing practices to avoid plagiarism:

- Consult the TCD Library guide at: https://libguides.tcd.ie/academic-integrity/

Plagiarism will lead to automatic failure and the matter will be reported to the student's tutor and the dean of the faculty; severe penalties are likely to ensue, including possible exclusion from the exam or even the College, in accordance with College policy.

Use of Generative AI Tools in Learning and Assignments

In line with Trinity College Dublin and School guidelines, the use of Generative AI (e.g. ChatGPT, Copilot, Gemini, Claude, etc.) will be permitted in this module with **strict limitations**. The aim is to support your learning while ensuring that your submitted work reflects your own ideas, critical thinking, and academic integrity.

Permitted uses of AI for learning and assignments:

- Clarifying concepts or definitions (e.g. What does "endogeneity" mean? Why is it important? What is the advantage of experimental methods?) to aid your learning.

- Brainstorming for ideas or general directions on your research projects or their components.

- Proofreading, grammar, or clarity checks. Rephrasing *your own* ideas for clarity.

Prohibited uses:

- Generating research questions, literature reviews, empirical strategies, or proposal sections.

- Suggesting or providing references, evidence, or data. AI tools often produce inaccurate, biased, or fabricated references.

- Writing any substantive part of your assignments

- Summarising or paraphrasing academic readings, lecture material, or source texts. You must engage directly with the material yourself to be able to learn

- Rewriting large sections of your work using AI ("plagiarism-by-proxy").

Disclosure requirement:

All submitted assignments (Research Question, Literature Review, Empirical Strategy, and Final Proposal) must include a **Generative AI Use Statement**, disclosing the tool (name, publisher, URL), how it was used, and (if beyond basic proofreading) provide details of prompts, dates, and how outputs were adapted.

Responsibility:
You are fully accountable for the originality, accuracy, and integrity of your work. Any undisclosed or inappropriate use of AI tools will be treated as academic misconduct and subject to the same penalties as plagiarism under College policy.

Disability Policy

Students with a disability are encouraged to register with the Disability Service to seek supports where the disability could affect their ability to participate fully in all aspects of the course.

Mental Health

If you have any concerns or are experiencing personal and interpersonal difficulties, you can contact the Student Counselling Services and get some support and resources to help you: https://www.tcd.ie/Student_Counselling/

Key Texts

The main texts for this module are:

- Johnson, Janet Buttolph, Reynolds, H.T., and Mycoff, Jason D. 2015. *Political Science Research Methods.* CQ Press. **[JRM]**
- King, G., Keohane, R.O., Verba, S. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research.* Princeton University Press. **[KKV]**
- Richard Rich et al. 2018. *Empirical Political Analysis.* Pearson Higher Ed. Second edition. **[Rich et al.]**

We will also read a selection of articles and chapters as detailed in the module schedule below. Most readings and other relevant materials will be posted on Blackboard.

These textbooks are available from the Library.

Syllabus Modification Rights

I reserve the right to reasonably alter the elements of the syllabus at any time. More often than not this will mean adjusting the reading list to keep pace with the course schedule, although I may add reading assignments as well.

Module Schedule & Readings

Week 1: The scientific study of politics. Research ethics.

KKV, Chapter 1

Desposato, Scott. 2014. "Ethics and research in comparative politics." *The Monkey Cage Blog.* Link

Fuji, Lee Ann. 2012. "Research ethics 101: Dilemmas and responsibilities." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 45(4): 717-723.

Optional:

JRM, Chapter 2

Rich et al., Chapter 1

Yanow, D., 2003. "Interpretive empirical political science: What makes this not a subfield of qualitative methods." *Qualitative Methods, 1*(2), pp.9-13.

Popper, K., (1963). "Science as falsification." In: *Conjectures and Refutation*, 33-39.

Feynman, Richard (1964) "On the Scientific Method." [9:59], available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EYPapE-3FRw

American Political Science Association.2020. "Principles and guidance for human Subjects Research." Link

Week 2: Research questions, theories and hypotheses

JRM, Chapters 3-4

Firebaugh, G., 2008. "The first rule: There should be the possibility of surprise in social research." In: *Seven Rules for Social Research*. Princeton University Press, Chapter 1.

KKV, pp. 100-114

Hoffman, Michael and Amaney Jamal. 2014. "Religion in the Arab spring: Between two competing claims." *The Journal of Politics, 76*(3): 593-606.

Optional:

Rich et al., Chapter 2.

Geddes, Chapter 2.

Zinnes, Dina A. 1980. "Three puzzles in search of a researcher." *International Studies Quarterly* 24(3): 315-42

Week 3: Conceptualization, operationalization, and measurement

JRM, Chapter 5

Lasswell, Harold. 1946. "Despotism." [9:56] Link

Hooghe, Marc, and Sofie Marien. 2013. "A comparative analysis of the relation between political trust and forms of political participation in Europe." *European Societies* 15(1): 131-152.

Pearlman, Wendy. 2016. "Narratives of Fear in Syria." *Perspectives on Politics* 14(1):21-37.

Optional:

Gerring, John. 1999. "What makes a concept good? A criterial framework for understanding concept formation in the social sciences." *Polity* 31(3): 357-393.

Adcock, R. and Collier, D. 2001. "Measurement validity: A shared standard for qualitative and quantitative research." *American Political Science Associatio n, 95*(3): 529-546.

Munck, Gerardo L. and Jay Verkuilen. 2002. Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy: Evaluating Alternative Indices. *Comparative Political Studies* 35(1): 5-34.

Week 4: The logic of statistical analysis: Large-n designs

Rich et al., Chapters 4 and 6

Coppedge, Michael. 2007. Theory Building and Hypothesis Testing: Large- vs. Small-N Research on Democratization. In Gerardo Munck (ed.), *Regimes and Democracy in Latin America: Theories and Methods*, Oxford University Press, pp. 163-177.

Tezcür, Gunes Murat. 2016. "Ordinary people, extraordinary risks: Participation in an ethnic rebellion." *American Political Science Review*, *110*(2): 247-264.

Optional

Tarrow, Sidney. 1995. Bridging the quantitative-qualitative divide in political science. *American Political Science Review*, *89*(2): 471-474.

Carpenter, Daniel and Moore, Colin D., 2014. "When canvassers became activists: Antislavery petitioning and the political mobilization of American women." *American Political Science Review*, *108*(3): 479-498.

Week 5: Causation and controlled experiments

Smeets, Ionica. 2012. "The danger of mixing up causality and correlation." [5:56] Link

Dubner, Stephen and Steven Levitt. 2011. "Correlation vs. causality" [3:22] Link

Masten, Matt. 2015. "Counterfactuals." [4:52] Link

JRM, Chapter 6

KKV, pp. 75-91.

Paler, Laura, Leslie Marshall, and Sami Atallah. 2020. "How cross-cutting discussion shapes support for ethnic politics: Evidence from an experiment in Lebanon." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 15(1): 33-71.

Optional:

McDermott, R., 2002. "Experimental methods in political science." *Annual Review of Political Science, 5*(1): 31-61.

Sands, Melissa L. 2017. "Exposure to inequality affects support for redistribution." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 114, no. 4 (2017): 663-668.

Bond, Robert M., et al. 2012. "A 61-million-person experiment in social influence and political mobilization." *Nature* 489 (7415): 295-298.

Guess, Andrew et al. 2023. "How do social media feed algorithms affect attitudes and behavior in an election campaign?" *Science* 381(6656): 398-404.

Week 6: Natural experiments and as-if randomization

Watch: John Snow and the 1854 Broad Street Cholera Outbreak [8:01] Link

Watch: Justifying as-if randomization [2:41] Link

Erikson, Robert, and Laura Stoker. 2011. "Caught in the draft: The effects of Vietnam draft lottery status on political attitudes." *American Political Science Review, 105*(2): 221-237.

Galiani, Sebastian, and Ernesto Schargrodsky. 2004. "Effects of land titling on child health." *Economics and Human Biology* 2(3): 353-372.

Optional:

Sekhon, Jasjeet S. and Rocio Titiunik. 2012. "When natural experiments are neither natural nor experiments." *American Political Science Review, 106*(1): 35-57.

Bhavnani, Rikhil R. 2009. "Do electoral quotas work after they are withdrawn? Evidence from a natural experiment in India. *American Political Science Review, 103*(1): 23-35.

Week 7: Reading week. No class.

Week 8: Small-n research designs. The comparative method

Collier, David. 1993. The Comparative Method. In Ada W. Finifter (ed.), *Political Science: The State of the Discipline II,* Washington, D.C.: American Political Science Association, pp. 105-119.

KKV, Chapter 4

Blaydes, Lisa. 2014. "How does Islamist local governance affect the lives of women?" *Governance, 27*(3): 489-509.

Optional:

Geddes, Chapters 3-4

Posner, Daniel. 2004. "The political salience of cultural difference: Why Chewas and Tumbukas are allies in Zambia and adversaries in Malawi." *American Political Science Review* 98(4): 529-545.

Week 9: Small-n research designs. Case studies and process tracing

Hall, Peter A. (2008). Systematic process analysis: when and how to use it. *European Political Science*, 7(3), 304-317.

Ricks, Jacob and Amy Liu. 2018. "Process-tracing research designs: A practical guide." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 51(4): 842-846.

Haggard, Stephan, and Kaufman, Robert R. 2012. "Inequality and regime change: Democratic transitions and the stability of democratic rule." *American Political Science Review* 106(3): 495–516.

Optional:

Gerring, John. 2004. "What is a case study and what is it good for?" *American Political Science Review* 98(2): 341.354.

Seawright, Jason, and Gerring, John. 2008. "Case selection techniques in case study research: A menu of qualitative and quantitative options." *Political Research Quarterly*, 61(2): 294-308.

Collier, David, 2011. "Understanding process tracing." *PS: Political Science & Politics, 44*(04): 823-830.

Mahoney, James. 2015. "Process tracing and historical explanation." *Security Studies, 24*(2): 200-218.

Week 10: Data collection I. Surveys and interviews

JRM Chapters 8, 10

Dornschneider, Stephanie. 2021. Exit, Voice, Loyalty… or Deliberate Obstruction? Non-Collective Everyday Resistance under Oppression. *Perspectives on Politics*, pp.1-16.

Fujii, Lee Ann. 2008. "The power of local ties: Popular participation in the Rwandan genocide." *Security Studies, 17*(3): 568-597.

Optional

Rich et al., Chapters 8 and 20

Zaller, John and Stanley Feldman. 1992. A Simple Theory of the Survey Response: Answering Questions versus Revealing Preferences. *American Journal of Political Science* 36(3): 579-616.

Bakker, Ryan, Catherine De Vries, Erica Edwards, Liesbet Hooghe, Seth Jolly, Gary Marks, Jonathan Polk, Jan Rovny, Marco Steenbergen, and Milada Anna Vachudova. 2015. "Measuring party positions in Europe: The Chapel Hill expert survey trend file, 1999–2010." *Party Politics* 21(1): 143-152.

Berry, Jeffrey M. 2002. Validity and Reliability Issues in Elite Interviewing. *Political Science and Politics* 35(4): 679-682.

21 November (Friday), Empirical strategy due (via Blackboard)

Week 11: Data collection II. Content analysis and text-as-data

JRM, Chapter 9

Rich et al., Chapter 10

Dilling, Matthias, and Félix Krawatzek. 2024. "The populist radical right as memory entrepreneur? The prominence, sentiment, and interpretations of history in the German Parliament." *British Journal of Political Science* 54(4): 1296-1317.

Optional:

Hanna, Alexander. 2013. Computer-Aided Content Analysis of Digitally Enabled Movements. *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 18(4):367-388.

Oktay, Sibel. 2024. "Crisis leadership in the time of Covid: Effects of personality traits on response speed." *International Studies Perspectives* (2024): ekae001.

Boussalis, Constantine, Travis G. Coan, Mirya R. Holman, and Stefan Müller. 2021. "Gender, candidate emotional expression, and voter reactions during televised debates." *American Political Science Review* 115(4): 1242-1257.

Week 12: Writing research proposals

Mensh Brett and Konrad Kording. 2017. "Ten simple rules for structuring papers." *PLoS Computational Biology* 13(9): e1005619

Optional

Becker, Howard. 2020. *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article.* The University of Chicago Press.

15 December (Monday), 5pm – Final research proposals due (via Blackboard)